



4th Brigade, 75th Division as the **Defense Coordinating Element** for *Hurricanes Katrina and Rita*

On 26 August 2005, three days before Hurricane Katrina made landfall in the Gulf coast region, the 4th Brigade, 75th Division (Training Support), Fort Sill, Oklahoma, was notified to deploy the Defense Coordinating Officer and Defense Coordinating Element to Louisiana in support of Hurricane Katrina relief and response activities. The Commander of the 4th Brigade is a designated Defense Coordinating Officer for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region VI, which consists of Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas and New Mexico. His

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staff, the Defense Coordinating Element, for the most part, consists of personnel from the 4th Brigade.

The mission was to deploy to Louisiana in support of the Federal Coordinating Officer, the lead FEMA official whose job is to coordinate all federal response to the hurricane.

The Defense Coordinating Officer acts as the single point of contact for all agencies to request Department of Defense (DoD) assets for defense support of

civil authorities (DSCA). The Defense Coordinating Element validates requests for support from DoD for both forces and (or) equipment and forwards them through Northern Command (NORTH-COM) to the Secretary of Defense for approval. Requests for National Guard assistance are handled by The Adjutant General (TAG) for the state.

The 4th Brigade Defense Coordinating Element's mission expanded to include Hurricane Rita response efforts after Rita made landfall on 24 September. The element remained in Louisiana until the last DoD asset involved in the

response redeployed from the area on 15 November—although the element's support mission continues today from home station at Fort Sill.

During a teleconference on 27 August, the Defense Coordinating Officer and the brigade's DSCA planner were told they would deploy to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to link up with a FEMA-led federal team already en route. Within hours, it was clear the storm's impact was going to be much greater than originally forecast.

At this point, the remainder of the Defense Coordinating Element received orders to deploy. The element included the brigade S2 officer-in-charge (OIC) and NCO for intelligence collection, S6 for communications support, the assistant S3 to act as the team chief, the training chief and current operations officer for day and night operations, the training officer as the liaison officer (LNO) to Joint Task Force (JTF) Katrina (to be stood up later), the training NCO-in-charge (NCOIC) and current operations NCO as operations NCOs, and a finance NCO. Early on 28 August, the element drove to Houston, Texas, and began 24-hour operations to track Hurricane Katrina and wait for the storm to pass so traveling to Louisiana would be safe.

Scope of the Relief and Response Operations. On 30 August, the element moved forward to the state emergency operations center (EOC) in Baton Rouge and joined the Defense Coordinating Officer and DSCA Planner in 24-hour operations to process assistance requests and continue the flow of federal forces into the affected areas. At the same time, the Defense Coordinating Elements of Mississippi, Alabama and Florida carried out similar missions in response to their states' requirements.

Due to the scale of the disaster and the sheer number of federal troops involved, DoD activated JTF Katrina on 30 August to assume command and control of all DoD forces in the joint operational area (JOA), making history as the first JTF activated for a natural disaster relief effort.

During the course of Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, the Defense Coordinating Element helped organize federal support for the evacuation of more than 80,000 displaced civilians from New Orleans and surrounding parishes; coordinated for more than one million cases of meals ready-to-eat (MREs) to feed stranded and displaced civilians; provided aerial imagery of the disaster area to aid in search and rescue efforts and help re-



COL Anthony F. Daskevich, Defense Coordinating Officer (far left), and COL John A. (Jay) Simpson, JTF Katrina's Planning Group (center), discuss operations with MG Steven P. Best, 75th Training Support Division Commanding General, and a staffer while onboard the USS *Iwo Jima*.

covery operations; provided helicopter support for command and control, search and rescue missions and evacuations; provided medical support to the affected areas; and helped in debris removal. At the peak of operations, there were more than 20,000 Active and Reserve Components Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines in the JOA working relief and recovery operations.

When Hurricane Rita hit southwestern Louisiana, the Defense Coordinating Element worked with the state government, FEMA, JTF Katrina, JTF Rita (responsible for Texas) and NORTHCOM to provide quick relief to the hard-hit Cameron and Vermilion Parishes. Within hours of Rita's landfall, the *USS Bataan* began rescue operations to evacuate civilians from the flooded coastal areas while other troops moved from New Orleans to Cameron Parish to supplement search and rescue, evacuation and relief efforts. With the Defense Coordinating Element's efforts in conjunction with those of FEMA and JTF Katrina, a 500-bed tent city was raised in less than 72 hours in Cameron Parish where the only building left standing was the parish courthouse.

While activated for Hurricane Katrina and Rita, the Defense Coordinating Element processed more than 115 requests for assistance and 98 missions to provide military support to Louisiana, totaling more than \$840,000,000 in financial obligations.

After completing all the missions

involving DoD forces, the Defense Coordinating Element redeployed to Fort Sill where it is still engaged in tracking mission costs and monitoring requirements from FEMA. The 4th Brigade stands ready to fulfill future DSCA requirements until the transfer of the mission to Army North (ARNORTH) at the end of FY06.

Lessons Learned. As DoD troops accomplished the missions and helped countless people, we learned many lessons, some of which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

- *Communications equipment was a problem.* During operations in the state EOC, the Defense Coordinating Element had to share limited access to telephones and computers in a large, crowded state facility to coordinate assistance and receive and send information. But as the cellular phone systems were not operational and our location was not conducive to satellite reception, we were limited to the communications capabilities the EOC could provide. When the FEMA Joint Field Office (JFO) stood up on 8 September, the Defense Coordinating Element moved into the JFO to collocate with other federal agencies. Ten phone lines and 15 FEMA computers were provided for the element's use. This equipment met the element's requirements. However, as determined by the location and size of a future disaster, FEMA may not be able to provide the communications equipment needed in the future.

Robust, stand-alone communications systems must be acquired for the DSCA mission. This should include a satellite system capable of both telephone and email traffic for long-haul communications because local systems may not be reliable during disasters.

- *There was no standard automation system to gather, store and share information.* To get up-to-date information and status reports, the Defense Coordinating Element had to monitor the First Army Portal, Fifth Army Portal, and the NORTHCOM and FEMA disaster relief websites. Also, there was no guidance or system in place for historical documentation or archival email information. The information-sharing requirement was met later in the relief efforts through the use of the dynamic synchronization event log (DSEL).

Unfortunately, the Defense Coordinating Element staff had not been fielded with or trained on the system. Although NORTHCOM sent a trainer, there was not enough time to learn and implement the system while simultaneously conducting the DSCA mission.

One way to fix this problem is to maintain the DSEL, or an equivalent system, during garrison activities so all members of the Defense Coordinating Element can train on it and practice using it. Thus, in a disaster relief effort, all organizations and units would be able to use DSEL to submit and receive

situation reports (SITREPs), research assistance requests and submit information requests. If DSEL expanded to include email capabilities, collecting historical email traffic would not be an issue for post-relief effort inquiries; all the emails would be on one server. This would facilitate maintenance of the historical archives.

- *The Defense Coordinating Element needed more personnel trained to accomplish the DSCA mission.* Due to the high volume of requests, the original number of personnel who deployed to Baton Rouge was “hard-pressed” to keep pace with operations. As soon as the size and complexity of the mission became clear, the Defense Coordinating Officer called for more personnel from the brigade to support the operations.

After more people arrived and the Defense Coordinating Element moved to the JFO, the element accomplished mission requirements more easily. At the same time, there was a large learning curve for many of the element’s members. This was because many of the reinforcement personnel had not received training on the DSCA mission.

At the height of the response, the Defense Coordinating Element had more than 50 personnel, including emergency preparedness LNOs from all the services and a joint regional medical

plans officer.

A key position that was not filled was the judge advocate general (JAG). All legal issues were addressed to the First Army JAG at Fort Gillam, Georgia. The best option is for a staff judge advocate (SJA) officer to deploy with the Defense Coordinating Element and provide legal guidance. This would eliminate the time lag caused by “reach back” for legal guidance.

- *Unit mission tracking was an issue because the units deployed without orders that stated what their missions were.* This made it tough to track what unit was conducting which mission. In turn, it was hard to track missions as they were completed and re-mission the units.

The solution is two-fold. First, all deployment orders must state clearly the unit’s mission. Second, each unit must submit a daily report about the status of its mission. These issues tie into the last lesson learned about finances.

- *Financial tracking and reimbursements are difficult.* Each DoD unit that conducts a DSCA mission must track estimated funds outflow and submit a daily report to the Defense Coordinating Element that includes this information. The unit also must submit an initial cost estimate before redeploying from the JOA. The Defense Coordinating Element uses the cost estimate to ensure FEMA reimbursement funds are

The Role of the Defense Coordinating Officer and Element in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Relief Efforts

During Hurricanes Katrina and Rita relief and response efforts, the Defense Coordinating Officer and his staff, the Defense Coordinating Element, were from the 4th Brigade, 75th Division (Training Support), Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The brigade has a standing mission to plan and coordinate defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) for civil emergencies or attacks, including national security emergencies, and help state and local agencies, as directed. The Defense Coordinating Element manages support from federal military Active and Reserve Components’ resources. National Guard forces remain under the governor’s control, unless federalized.

If, when a disaster occurs, a governor does not have enough local and state resources to respond effectively, he requests a Presidential disaster declaration to use federal resources. When the President declares a federal disaster area, he appoints a Federal Coordinating Officer from the Federal Emergency

Management Agency (FEMA), part of the Department of Homeland Security, to direct the federal response.

At the discretion of the Secretary of Homeland Security, a Principal Federal Official may be appointed, who becomes the lead federal official responsible for facilitating federal support and resolving interagency conflicts as well as coordinating overall federal incident management. The Principal Federal Official, usually, neither directs or replaces the command structure for the response elements nor has authority over the Federal Coordinating Officer or other federal or state officials. However, during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita relief efforts, the Principal Federal Official assumed the roles and responsibilities of not only his appointment, but also those of the Federal Coordinating Officer.

The Federal Coordinating Officer activates various federal agencies to provide emergency support functions for the disaster. At the Federal Coordinating

available.

This was not widely understood, so none of the units submitted expense reports or the initial cost estimates to the Defense Coordinating Element before redeploying. The solution is to ensure units and their higher headquarters are aware of the reporting requirement and enforce it.

ARNORTH DSCA Redesign. The majority of these issues will be addressed by the ARNORTH's plan to redesign DSCA. Under this plan, training support brigade commanders will no longer be Defense Coordinating Officers—these will be designated O-6s who are full-time Defense Coordinating Officers and collocated with their regional FEMA headquarters across the US. This move will allow Defense Coordinating Officers to participate in DSCA conferences, training and planning that training support brigade commanders have difficulty participating in due to competing demands.

There also will be standing Defense Coordinating Elements for each FEMA region trained in the policies and procedures for their assigned states that can participate in the state and FEMA meetings and training events.

These changes will allow the Defense Coordinating Officer and Defense Coordinating Element to be more familiar with their organization and federal team members as well as the

plans and team members in the state emergency preparedness agencies in their regions before a disaster declaration. This greater familiarity will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Defense Coordinating Officer and Defense Coordinating Element during a disaster response because they'll know the procedures and requirements as well as who to talk to for what. In return, the civilian agencies will become familiar with the procedures the military follows to support the mission.

The new ARNORTH structure has the potential to greatly increase the effectiveness of the Defense Coordinating Officer and Defense Coordinating Element during disasters.

Additionally, many issues can be resolved by training DoD forces on the DSCA mission and the National Response Plan. This training would increase service members' and leaders' knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of DoD units versus those of FEMA and other state and federal agencies. Units and personnel from all levels of command designated for DSCA missions should take part in joint exercises that cover all areas of these roles, responsibilities and requirements.

With a little time and effort, the challenges faced during this DSCA can be reduced significantly, and the DoD's effectiveness in responding to future

national disasters increased exponentially.

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Captain Tanya L. Schilling, Signal Corps (SC), is the 4th Brigade, 75th Division S6 at Fort Sill. She deployed with the Defense Coordinating Element as the S6 and remained in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for the duration of the defense support of civilian authorities (DSCA) mission for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita relief efforts. Previously, she commanded Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) of the 13th Signal Battalion, served as the Engineer Brigade S6 and Telecommunications Officer, all in the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas. She also was the Operations Officer for the 142nd Signal Battalion at Fort Lewis, Washington, and among other duties, planned and executed I Corps Warfighter communications.

Officer's request, the Secretary of Defense appoints a Defense Coordinating Officer who activates his Defense Coordinating Element to coordinate requests for federal military assistance.

The Defense Coordinating Officer validates and forwards requests for military assistance to the approving military authority for resolution. If approved, a military element from one of the armed services or a defense agency is assigned to provide the assistance. While providing the assistance, the military element or defense agency is under the operational control (OPCON) of the Defense Coordinating Officer, with the exception of the US Army Corps of Engineers. Military installations may be designated as a base support installation (BSI) to provide logistical assistance to the Defense Coordinating Element and its sub-elements.

If a large amount of federal military resources or a number of task forces are assigned to provide DSCA, a joint

task force (JTF) headquarters may be designated for command and control of all Department of Defense (DoD) assets. Such was the case for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita relief. JTF Katrina was task-organized into five task forces: TF *All American*, Marine Forces Katrina (MARFOR-K), Joint Forces Air Component Command (JFACC), Joint Forces Maritime Component Command (JFMCC) and Joint Logistics Command in coordination with The Adjutant Generals (TAGS) of Louisiana and Mississippi.

The Defense Coordinating Element validates and forwards mission assignments to the JTF. It also acts as a liaison between any JTF (JTF Katrina), the Federal Coordinating Officer and (or) Principal Federal Official, and FEMA to coordinate DoD support for the relief efforts.

The element currently consists mostly of personnel from the parent unit but also can include personnel from other

organizations. These might be from its numbered Army, emergency preparedness liaison officers (EPLOs) from various services and special staff from a several DoD organizations. The staffing of the Defense Coordinating Element is flexible and depends on the type of disaster and the anticipated workload.

Based on the model established by the National Incident Management System (NIMS), the Defense Coordinating Element is divided into four major sections: command; operations; administration/logistics; and reception, staging, onward movement and integration (RSOI).

The Defense Coordinating Officer also has a special staff that may include a lawyer, a public affairs officer, a joint regional medical planner and a chaplain. In the case of Hurricane Katrina and Rita disaster relief, the 1st Battalion, 290th Training Support provided reconnaissance and escort teams to help in RSOI of incoming OPCON elements.